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chakrax

## Advaita concepts of Maya and Mithya

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### Advaita concepts of Maya and Mithya

The concepts of Maya and Mithya are central to Advaita Vedanta, yet they are misunderstood by many. The purpose of this article is to present a clear and concise explanation of these concepts, so one may understand what A-dvaita or non-dualism actually means.

I constantly see statements like "Maya means illusion" or "the world doesn't exist". These types of statements are true from certain points of reference, and false from other frames of reference. As an example, consider a flying airplane. If you are in it, the airplane is not moving; if you are on the ground, the airplane is moving; if you are in space, both the ground and airplane are moving. **So it is important to mention your frame of reference when you make such statements.**

Let's start with some clear definitions:

Sanskrit	English	Meaning
Satyam or Sat	Real (uppercase R)	something that is <i>always</i> true or exists, in all three periods of time - past, present, future. Absolutely Real.
tuccham	unreal (lowercase u)	something that not exist, a figment of the imagination, like rabbit's horns
Mithya	Unreal (uppercase U)	something that is neither Satyam nor tuccham. Relatively Real. Dependent Reality.
Avidya	ignorance in individual	Power that causes mis-perception, like seeing a rope as a snake
Maya	Universal ignorance	Cosmic power that causes mis-perception; occurrence of Avidya at the cosmic level

A fine example of Mithya is your shadow. It is not imaginary; it exists. But it depends on your body and light for existence. So it enjoys dependent existence; it is not absolutely existent. However, that doesn't mean that the shadow is "illusion".

Another example of Mithya is the ocean and waves. Both are Mithya. Why? Both ocean and waves are just water, with different forms. They are dependent on water for existence.

We can take this one step further and examine matter and consciousness. The existence of any object is proved only when it is observed. Let us say there is an object that has never been observed. No one would acknowledge that object as valid! Therefore, some Consciousness must observe this object to prove its existence. So, any object is dependent on Consciousness to be validated. So it is Mithya.

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(Mithya). Vedanta tells us that Consciousness (Brahman) alone is Satyam.

Avidya is the ignorance of the Jiva at the individual or micro level regarding his/her true nature. In the Absolute Paramarthika Reality, Jiva is the same as Brahman. Ignorance of this truth is Avidya. We can also say that due to Avidya, Jiva perceives himself as different than Brahman.

Maya is Cosmic Avidya at the macro level. Maya makes the world appear as different than Brahman. **In other words, Maya is Matter, Brahman is Consciousness.**

With that terminology we can define our worldview from different points of reference.

Frame of reference	Nature of reality	State	Brahman	Maya	Individual (Jiva)	Universe (Jagat)	God (Isvara)	Comments
Absolute	Paramarthika	n/a	Yes	No	Brahman	No	No	This is why philosophy called A-dvaita. In the absolute reality, there is only Brahman.
Relative	Vyavaharika	Waking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	World exists! God Exists!
Relative	Pratibhasika	Dream	Yes	Yes	Makes own dream world	No	No	Jiva creates reality. Relative to this state Jiva is the supreme reality.
Relative	Causal	Causal	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Jiva/Jagat/Isvara all resolve in Brahman

"The Universe is an illusion" makes sense from the Absolute Reality point of view. But in our waking transactional state, it is not an illusion; the world exists, and so does God. This is why Bhakti is still relevant in Advaita Vedanta. In the waking state, God exists, and can be prayed to. If someone calls you by name when you are awake, it's silly to ignore them because in Absolute Reality, you are Brahman. Actions need to make sense in the state of reality you are transacting in.

### How does this knowledge help?

So what is the use of this knowledge of the Absolute Reality? It helps in reducing the importance we attribute to this waking world; it allows us to be detached and practice Karma Yoga.

In conclusion it is helpful to review Shankaracharya's famous summary of Advaita Vedanta:

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I will be happy to correct any mistakes I made along this way. Thank you for reading.

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**BlueCoolant** · 3y ago ·

Nice write up and thank you for this 🙏. I have a question though.

We can take this one step further and examine matter and consciousness. The existence of any object is proved only when it is observed. Let us say there is an object that has never been observed. No one would acknowledge that object as valid! Therefore, some Consciousness must observe this object to prove its existence. So, any object is dependent on Consciousness to be validated. So it is Mithya.

Is this the reason Vedanta or for that matter A-dvaita says that Consciousness and not matter is Absolute? This may sound like a dumb question.



2

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**chakrax** **OP** · 3y ago ·

This is one of the reasons, and to me the simplest, most obvious and easy to grasp, even without knowledge of Vedanta. And this is the way my Guru explained Mandukya Upanishad. Here are a couple more reasons that I can think of, but these rely on Veda-pramanam.

- The Self alone is Real, and it is always the subject. Everything we perceive (including our body and mind) is an object, and therefore mithya.

BG 2.18 It is said – Perishable are these bodies, which belong to the eternal, imperishable and un-objectifiable Self. Therefore fight, Oh Arjuna.

- Changelessness - Brahman is described as changeless, and we can see that matter changes.

1

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blowing air bubbles. We can say "This is my bubble and that is your bubble". But if all the bubbles popped up, can we say "This is my air, that is yours".....? Bubble is like physical body, which gives a false and temporary identity which most people falsely consider as "me". Jnana is essential for one, to realise the reality. But to purify the mind so that it can be ready for realisation, one needs bhakti. The role of bhakti is to wash ones mind which constantly gets washed away in the patterns of life. Jnana can only be attained if one has purified himself with bhakti. Now a question arises... "If reality is nondual Brahman, then why worship Vishnu, Shiva, etc..?" Well here is the answer. For the sake of understanding, let's compare Brahman to air, and physical creation to air bubbles. Now, "maya" is that illusory energy which is the reason for the existence of these temporary creation in the supreme reality (Para Brahman). Everything we see through our eyes, hear through our ears is maya. Because, these things belong to the physicality. That doesn't mean "maya" is bad. Humans have misunderstood everything is their limited logic perceives. Everything is happening in the mind. Reality is different. This is maya. Vishnu and Shiva are the "maayaamaya roopa" of that nondual Brahman. "maayaamaya" means, it has taken a beautiful shape to protect the creation. Fire is a "maayaamaya roopa of air". Similarly, "Vishnu and Shiva are the maayaamaya roopas of that single, nondual Brahman which is complete by itself. We worship them to ignite the bhakti which cleans the mind so that, realisation must happen. "What is Mukti then?" Today, most people think that getting into another lokas is liberation. You need to understand that in previous yugas, Rishis and people used to visit those lokas similar to how we visit sacred pilgrim places. It is only now (Kali Yuga), people have lost that ability. Then, what was the liberation that people in previous yugas were seeking? It is "Brahma Nirvana". People in previous yugas were worshiping God's to lead a healthy and prosperous life. But when it comes to Mukti, they were going to the Jungle and performing yoga, tapas, etc., to get Brahma Jnana. So, liberation truly means getting out of this birth-death cycle. No matter what loka you are in. As long you have some kind of existence, you are subjected to duality. There is a story in Padma Purana where a person goes back to get birth again, even if he did his hari pooja daily in his lifetime, due to his inability to gain control over lust. There are numerous such stories. So, "Brahman Nirvana" means, the subtle body (sookshma sharira) getting vanished and the conditioned atma (soul) merging into supreme Brahman. We can call it as "going back to self", "gaining back the real identity" or "I am Brahman, but till then I was subjected to illusion(maya)". As most of the people in Kali Yuga are not able to master the self, bhakti is the only way to get into another loka after this life. But for Brahma Nirvana, Bhakti alone is not enough. Once you get it, never ever coming back to dualistic maya again. Hence, in previous yugas, people were worshiping Saguna Brahma(Brahman with shape) to live a healthy and prosperous life. But for mukti, Jnana (self knowledge) is essential. It requires great detachment to gain Brahma Jnana. One seeking Brahma Jnana worships Gods, to make sure there is no difficulties in his way. It's just like making sure the door lock is opened. Getting out of the door, Jnana is required. No matter how you get it, Jnana is essential. Worshiping Gods and chanting mantras (like gayithri) is done to make sure there are no obstacles like distracted mind. Gaining Jnana completely depends on the individual. He must do "atma vimarshe" which means figuring out what's me and what's not me. Our Sanatana Dharma has taught us ways to achieve it. In Vedas, one can clearly observe Upanishadic part and non-upanishadic part. Non-upanishadic part tells us what's all these, what is what, it covers everything. But the Upanishadic parts covers the "liberation" part. Hence also called "Vedanta". Non-upanishadic part tells various ways to worship various gods. But Upanishads discuss the "mukti" briefly. Bhagavad Gita is an iconic summary of Upanishads. Unfortunately, there are lots of misinterpreted Gitas now which have completely lost Sri Krishna Paramatma. There were many Sages before Adi Shankaracharya, who all tried to make people understand the nondual nature of the existence. But most of them failed. Adi Shankaracharya succeeded as his bhashyas were in such a way that the limited(logical) mind can understand. So, to know the reality as it is, is to read and strive to make it in one's experience. Only by doing so, one can progress. Hari aum tat sat.

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A wonderful summary of the Mandukya Upanishad up to Chapter 2 Karika 19-23. The first 22 mins or so is totally sufficient to AV summed up in a veritable nutshell! Concerns the natur...

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The "I am" and the "is-ness"

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It's not arrogance.

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If I'm the individual consciousness and think and feel the way I do, how do you think the Universal consciousness/Brahman think and feel? What is the sensation of being "It"? Not an extension of it, but "I..."

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